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978-1-107-01783-2 - Viewpoint in Language: A Multimodal Perspective
Edited by Barbara Dancygier and Eve Sweetser
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Viewpoint in Language

What makes us talk about *viewpoint* and *perspective* in linguistic analyses and in literary texts, as well as in landscape art? Is this shared vocabulary marking real connections between the disparate phenomena? This volume argues that human cognition is not only rooted in the human body, but also inherently "viewpointed" as a result; consequently, so are language and communication. Dancygier and Sweetser bring together researchers who do not typically meet on common ground: analysts of narrative and literary style, linguists examining the uses of grammatical forms in signed and spoken languages, and analysts of gesture accompanying speech. Using models developed within cognitive linguistics, the book uncovers surprising functional similarities across various communicative forms, arguing for specific cognitive underpinnings of such correlations. What emerges is a new understanding of the role and structure of viewpoint and a groundbreaking methodology for investigating communicative choices across various modalities and discourse contexts.

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Preface

We felt we had to bring this volume together, when we realized how many colleagues – with differing methodologies and differing data – were converging on similar perceptions about viewpoint. The first of these perceptions is that viewpoint is far more pervasive in human cognition and language than has been recognized – no matter what the content of our perception, cognition, or linguistic expression, the content is never independent of viewpoint, and viewpoint expression is a crucial and constant job of human communication. Another shared perception is that despite the copious literature on, for example, narrative viewpoint, we are still unearthing new and subtle aspects of the relationships between different viewpoints or complex viewpoints, within discourses – and we need new ways to talk about these relationships. And yet another is the need to return to, and question, the relationship between physical perceptual viewpoint and abstract – for example, narrative – viewpoint.

By bringing together authors from different scholarly communities, we have been able to highlight parallels between viewpoint structures in domains that were not previously thought of as part of one investigation. Knowing that irony, for example, is a particular kind of viewpoint embedding, can help us relate it more precisely to other kinds of viewpoint embedding found in narrative. Noting that American Sign Language narratives, or co-speech gestures, actually use physical viewpoint to represent narrative viewpoint, we may view with new seriousness the place of perceptual viewpoint in "abstract" literary viewpoint. Mental Spaces Theory is a shared framework linking many of the contributions to the volume. The insights of our authors, however, are not dependent on a mental spaces framework; rather the framework serves the need expressed above, of providing clear and general formal expression of many varied, complex viewpoint relationships.

In our first section, on intersubjectivity and subjectification, three chapters present ways in which speakers create complex viewpoint structures by simultaneously evoking a network of contrasting and conflicting spaces. Vera Tobin and Michael Israel present a new analysis of irony, covering a full range of categories, from literary to situational irony. Irony cannot reside in one single mental space or viewpoint; it resides in that final, all-knowing viewer, who "sees

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it all" and assesses contrasts, a single subjectivity that incorporates a network of contrasting understandings of a situation. Lilian Ferrari and Eve Sweetser offer a treatment of historical semantic subjectification – for example, deictic markers becoming articles, or deontic modals taking on epistemic meanings – via incorporation of situational inference into conventional lexical semantics. They suggest that the result of such incorporation is "more subjective," precisely in the sense that the meanings incorporated are located in higher mental spaces, more distant from the space of the content being described. And Barbara Dancygier shows how negation not only evokes alternative spaces (the positive and negative alternatives), but gives very complex, distributed allocation of viewpoint when combined with stance verbs. *I don't think he can't write songs*, for example, may rebut an imagined *interlocutor* who might think that the speaker claims this songwriter cannot write; this is an extremely different meaning from *I think he can write songs*, and far more intersubjectively complex.

Our second section moves into the domain of co-speech gesture, where physical viewpoint crucially represents various kinds of speaker perspective and construal. Fey Parrill shows how Narrator Viewpoint, Observer Viewpoint, and Character Viewpoint are gesturally represented in narratives recounting the story of a cartoon, and develops an understanding of the relationship between the linguistic viewpoint and that manifested in the co-speech gesture. Shweta Narayan offers a view of how interlocutors' gestures manifest intersubjective sharing of viewpoint; in her case study, alignment of gestures demonstrates cognitive alignment with the interlocutor, while abandonment of that alignment for a new gestural perspective marks new cognitive construal of the content from an independent perspective. Both of these studies help advance gesture studies, by showing the very complex network of different spaces that can be "blended" with the physical gesture space. Speakers and gesturers never have access only to Narrator Viewpoint, or only to the interlocutor's viewpoint – gesture has meaning only in the context of the complex active network of cognitive construals, just as we saw with irony, lexical change, and narrative viewpoint. In addition, these studies remind us that the rich data offered by speech-accompanying gesture has much to tell us about linguistic as well as cognitive viewpoint.

Our third section offers two new contributions to the understanding of viewpoint in American Sign Language. Barbara Shaffer lays out the mechanisms for marking reported speech in ASL, showing that signed languages also have evidentiality-marking strategies, being grammaticized, in fact, by mechanisms very similar to those observed in spoken languages. Terry Janzen describes an ASL viewpoint-shifting structure that involves an imagined 180-degree rotation of the signer's body, so that the signer can alternately physically represent first one interlocutor in a described conversation, and then the other (facing) interlocutor. These chapters document new aspects of ASL grammar, but they also show again the ways in which viewpoint-indicating mechanisms

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necessarily evoke relations between multiple construals and views – to negotiate how a single signer represents reported speech, the signer's body and its surrounding space must be flexibly mapped, in a changing manner, onto different parts of the active network of meaning structure.

In our fourth section, we return to more traditional territory – to literary texts and narrative viewpoint, and also to grammar and grammatical marking of viewpoint. Kiki Nikiforidou discusses the well-known use of the English past tense with a proximal deictic *now* in narrative (e.g. *having spent several years as a graduate student in California . . . she* ***now*** *thought of herself as spiritually an American*). She argues that (1) it indicates a perspective shift to a vantage point inside the narrated event, and (2) that it should be viewed as having characteristics of a high-level discourse-structuring grammatical construction. Lieven Vandelanotte presents evidence for a distinct type of indirect discourse, namely "distancing indirect speech and thought," which incorporates a quoted speaker's discourse, while maintaining the viewpoint and deictic center aligned with the quoting speaker – for example, the sarcastic *you was going to do wonders, you was*, where *you* refers to the very addressee whose views are quoted. Like Nikiforidou's example, this can be seen as a discourse-level construction, which affects diverse grammatical choices, such as pronouns, deictics, or referential expressions. And also like Nikiforidou's example, it involves blending of different viewpoints, with aspects of the linguistic form marking each perspective.

Our "bookends," Eve Sweetser's Introduction and Barbara Dancygier's Conclusion, tie the collection together in different ways. Sweetser lays out an initial landscape of current approaches to viewpoint – including work in neuroscience, anthropology, and other related areas, as well as the fields represented in this volume. The goal is to give an overview of how new understandings of linguistic and communicative viewpoint can be integrated into both linguistics and the broader study of embodied cognition. Dancygier draws together the strands of the volume by summing up the varied types of relationships between communicative forms and expressed viewpoints that are touched on by our authors. She emphasizes not only the complexity of the cognitive phenomena represented by the deceptively simple linguistic and gestural structures examined here, but also the generalizability of models of mental space relations, such as compression and blending, in understanding the representation of (inter)subjectivity.

We hope that our readers will appreciate how inevitably these varied chapters belong together – a new, interdisciplinary understanding of viewpoint and perspective is emerging from these strands of scholarship, breaking down boundaries between literary and linguistic scholarship, between sign and spoken and written language studies, between gesture studies and language studies. We trust, of course, that some of those readers will carry the field forwards to new syntheses, which we cannot yet see from our current perspective.

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